

Pollen's Book on the Work of the British Navy

By W. B. McCORMICK.

OF all men who devote themselves to critical writing, the civilian who dissects and analyses naval topics is the most pontifical and austere. His field is one known professionally by comparatively few men in the world and which also has very limited literature. It is technical in the highest degree; and its aridity is all the more marked from the fact that naval officers the world over write little and talk less of their professional work than the devotees of any other career. And until the naval world acquires such a host of "passionate press agents" as has the operative world, for example, it is likely to remain as it is to-day, a profound mystery to the average landsman.

Nowhere has the naval critic been more pontifical than is Arthur H. Pollen in the pages of *The British Navy in Battle*; and nowhere has he more successfully made his subject unintelligible and antagonistic to the lay reader in search of light on this subject. Mr. Pollen laments, in his chapter on *Sea Fallacies*, how difficult it has been for the layman to acquire an understanding of naval affairs that is based on a study of Mahan and then is inextricably confused by modern developments in steam, armor and guns. Mr. Pollen adds to this confusion by stating—in the midst of these regrets—that "first we heard that naval guns, that until 1904 had nowhere been fired at a greater range than two miles, were actually being used in practice—and used with success—at distances of ten, twelve and fourteen thousand yards."

Let us see: Two nautical miles is 4,026 yards. At the Battle of Manila Bay, six years before the date Mr. Pollen gives, Dewey began his famous action at 5,600 yards, gradually closing in to 2,600 yards. So it is a fact that the above statement is incorrect and is likely only to add to the student's confusion. We cite this error and the second incorrect statement as to the percentage of American troops carried in British ships to France to point out an essential defect in Mr. Pollen's work. This is that it is too parochial, as is shown by his failure to recall the range of Dewey's guns and by the writer's obsession by British politics as affecting the conduct of the British Admiralty.

Mahan pointed out that "Pitt's system," which won the Seven Years War for the British, was chiefly due to the fact that he controlled the "army, navy and strategy." But the average student of naval affairs must go a long way in his studies before he reaches such subliminal heights as that combination. What he wants to work on a navy in battle, such as this purports to be, are descriptions and analyses of actions—desires new light on them. But Mr. Pollen, like so many critics, puts between his readers and his subject a cloud of prejudices such as his objections to the conduct of the British Admiralty and his unconcealed prejudice against Sir John Jellicoe. His criticisms

of Sir John are shown to be formed on grounds not at all well informed, as we now know through newspaper quotations from Jellicoe's new book. In the light of the Admiralty reports on the battle of Jutland and its admirable maps, than which nothing better has yet appeared on this action, Mr. Pollen shows himself to be prejudiced, without any special technical information, and in view of these facts his assumptions as to the course of the action and the motives of Sir John and Admiral Beatty do not hold water. It is not possible to illustrate the lameness of this critic better than to cite his chapter on the Zeebrugge and Ostend operations on St. George's Day, 1918. The Admiralty reports on these affairs are infinitely better than is Mr. Pollen's, and to any one who has had the happy privilege of hearing the lecture by Capt. Carpenter of H. M. S. *Vindictive* on the Zeebrugge action this winter's description and analysis will seem ill informed indeed.

Quite the best chapter in the book is that on the destruction of the German cruiser *Koenigsberg* by the British monitors *Mersey* and *Severn* in the Rufiji Delta in Africa. Most of the letterpress is quoted from a description by one of the participants, who tells the story of the action in good crisp naval fashion. Mr. Pollen's comments are sound; but here again he minimizes the fact of how quickly the naval officers in command of the two monitors rectified the errors of the first attack on the German ship on their second trial by going into action with one monitor first and following with the second separately, to the end that the shots could be "spotted" more accurately. Mr. Pollen is of the opinion that this should have been a common practice in gunnery, and that it was not he lays the blame, once more, on the doorstep of the British Admiralty.

That there always will be two schools of professional naval opinion is as near a certainty as any human prediction can be. But where does Mr. Pollen find "the popular fallacy" that "the battleships are useless, and that it is the submarine that reigns at sea" has any foundation in professional opinion? Mr. Pollen's statement on page 82 that Capt. Allen of H. M. S. *Kent*, in his fight with the *Nürnberg* in the Falkland Islands action, "pursued at full speed until he had crippled the enemy's engines" is not borne out by the statements in his detailed study of this battle, for on page 205 we read: "But suddenly, soon after half-past five, *Kent* . . . began to gain enormously upon her opponent. . . . It was obvious that *Nürnberg's* motive power had somehow come to grief. Had one of *Kent's* shells landed in her engines, or had one of her boilers, under the strain of so many hours' high pressure, given way?" The fact is that *Nürnberg* had the heels of *Kent* until that moment and Capt. Allen was chasing the German because he had to. No naval critic's sophistries can alter that condition of affairs.

Much of the matter in this volume has previously appeared in the English periodical *Land and Water*. Practically no effort has been made to bring it up to date and, therefore, the text must stand before the reader chiefly as an exhibition of contemporary naval criticism that is sadly out of date with only a slight historical interest, and this in a British political sense.

THE BRITISH NAVY IN BATTLE. BY ARTHUR H. POLLEN. Doubleday, Page & Co. \$2.50.

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Mr. Chambers's play is rather above the average, and as played by Cyril Maude recently it was deservedly successful. Read in one's own library it is a mild pastime.

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